Harold Weisberg
Hyattstown, Md. 20734
October 29, 1966

Mr. Norman Podhoretz, Editor
Commentary
165 East 65th. St.,
New York, N.Y. 10022

Dear Mr. Podhoretz,

Through your agency, the eminent and learned Chancellor Kent Professor of Law and Legal History at Yale University, Alexander M. Bickel, has done me two great services: he has made me acutely and appreciately aware of the great desireability of being unimportant and thereby not having the suffer the unthinking and unstinted friendship of such as he (Earl Warren may survive it, but I could not); and he has paid me the great honor of not soiling the name of my book WHITEWASH: THE REPORT ON THE WARREN REPORT by letting it pass his lips. For the second boon possibly I am equally indebted to you, for it was to you that I sent a copy the week of May 9, 1966.

Of course, it may just have been because my book reached you so much earlier than those this great and noble soul confined within the mortal (but quite superficial) indication of humanity, a body, managed to avoid consideration of it in what we must accept, because of his exalted scholarship and position and your reputation and that of your learned journal, as an exhaustive study of the literature on the Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy. Forgive me if I am less of a friend to the Chief Justice and, unlike the professor, slyly suggest that other names than his might be mentioned.

Then again, I may be entirely wrong in believing that I was forgotten. Please do not assume that I resent being forgotten, unmentioned. It is a circumstance I have learned to live with in equanimity and increasing sales, for I find that those commonly thought of as intellects, after their first few tastes - and this includes lawyers, as you may have heard -and if you have not, I'll be delighted to tell you - prefer to ignore a humble writer who suffers the indignity of living on a farm and in some mysterious way has managed to survive the lack of mention and false heaped laurels. If I may aspire to such an impudent and presumptious wish, for indeed I am as I know a humble man, without redundant degrees after my name (keep it secret-there are none), I would welcome the chance to, within those severe limitations I suffer (they must be great, for did not the professor ignore me?), debate this towering personage, in your pages or perhaps, if you have those connections one in your position often enjoys, let us say on a New York radio station.

This is perhaps be less forward and presumptious than at first may seem to be the case, for in that noble tradition from which, by his writing, the professor stems, that of the Chasidim, it frequently happened that the learned and lofty spent a few moments in efforts at enlightening the lowly. Perhaps you might also spare a few of those precious moments for such a kind purpose, the salvation of a lost soul.

When first I began to read "The Failure of the Warren Commission", I foolishly though it was a takeoff on Sholem Aleichem. I was led into this trap by the clear separation of this learned work from both the law, of which its author is such a resplendent authority, and reality, with which he has little association. Soon it became clear to even such clouded understanding as mine (please forgive me as you suffer it) that if it were Sholem Aleichim it would be tenth rate. No, said I, about this brilliant, respected, beloved, learned and admired Chancellor Kent Professor of Law and Legal History at Yale University, this tremenduous scholer, this author of sublime studies of the Supreme Court, he can be nothing tenth rate.

Then I recalled that in a magazine called Ramparts there was a spoof of the assassination of an American president and of those who say the people ought to know what happened. Perhpas the wise man sought to teach us by spoofing, my foolish and unlearned mind suggested. So I told myself, this would be but fifth rate spoofing and certainly this embodiement of the wisdom of the ages would associate himself with nothing fifth rate.

Aha! I said as the realization of what must be the truth slowly worked its way through the density of my thick head, this is nonsense - first rate nonsense, appropriate to such a great man! At last I understood, and what a relief! This is nonsense, presented otherwise to tax those of limited understanding and delight those who are wise, a fitting presentation for such a journal (I do not demean you by describing it, for I have also learned to be respectful of my betters).

So I must congratulate you, oh brilliant editor, for such a tour of intellectual force, for your and the professor's attainment of the absolute perfection in nonsense so cleverly disguised as a review. It is positively brilliant, without equal or the possibility of equal, all the more so because of the stature of its author.

One thing, however, does trouble me, no doubt because I am, as I know, a stupid and unlettered man. Perhaps in your day that is so busy - how long it must have taken you to search out the man who is without doubt the world's most preeminent expert in nonsense - just such hunts as this must be a near to full time occupation - you can take the few minutes to enlighten me. I trouble until I hear from you, I hope against hope and my wife will burn bench an extra candle until I do hear, but is it possible that the professor was talking of me when he said "others"?

I bow and scrape at the rare privelege of even an epistolary association with you greatest of the great of intellectual circles.

In deep humility,

Harold Weisberg

P.S. Were I not such a humble man, so painfully aware of my own ignorance of the subject of this great professor (after all, I wrote only two books on it), I would timidly suggest that you bring honor on all my descendents (this is but a figure of speech for I am childless) by perhaps an aristocratic gesture of common, ordinary people, of whom you may consider me one, by permitting me - if the mere thought is not too forward - the opportunity of seeing if I, despite my humble station, might say in your pages a few words about this masterpiece misentitled "The Failure of the Warren Report". I acknowledge that my similes will not fly so high, my conjectures will not even exist, and I will be handicapped by a devotion I owe to truth and fact as represented by evidence. But if you can just this one time consider permitting such a desecration of your pages, I will, quite naturally, be forever in your debt.